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# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 14:3 March 2014  
ISSN 1930-2940

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## Women as a Victim of Patriarchal Society in Vijay Tendulkar's Plays: *Silence! The Court is in Session, Kanyadan and Vultures*

Anju Bala

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### Abstract

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008), the Marathi dramatist, is undoubtedly a great playwright, known for his versatile genius and fecundity. As a leading contemporary Indian playwright, he has produced various short-stories, children's Books, essays and novels. By dint of hard work, he is widely acclaimed as one of the most influential dramatists of India, like Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, Aasif Currimbhoy and Mahesh Dattani. Some of his important plays are *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1968), *Encounter in Umbugland* (1969), *The Vultures* (1971), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972), *Kamala* (1982), and *Kanyadan* (1983). He is often referred to as a "contradictory and revolutionary" play-wright. His works have produced many

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:3 March 2014

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debates and discussions regarding the subject-matter, style and his personal views. As a social realist, he presents the black side of humanity in his dramas. He projects the image of women crushed under the forces of the patriarchal system. The present paper will try to concentrate on how Tendulkar presents the plight of Indian woman in this so-called modern society. The women in Tendulkar's plays have no identity of their own; they are just puppets in the hands of their male counterparts. As a playwright, Tendulkar is immensely concerned with the exploitation and victimization of women in a patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Identity, Exploitation, Victimization

### **Significant Issues Facing Us**

In this age of globalization, when we are on our way to becoming a developed country, the issues like Gender Equality, Women's Emancipation, and Women Empowerment have become very significant. After sixty years of Independence, are the women really emancipated? Does our society still discriminate on the basis of gender? Does education improve or ameliorate women's condition? We can easily find out the answers for all these questions through Vijay Tendulkar's novels. This paper will concentrate on explanations of women's status, their humiliation as well as victimization by the male dominated society in Tendulkar's three plays: *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Kanyadan* and *Vultures*, respectively. According to Feminists, in order to understand woman's position in this world, one should be familiarize with the term patriarchy. The patriarchal system portrays man as rational, bold, aggressive, dominating, independent, fearless, and having a tendency to rule and control. On the other hand, women are supposed to be docile, timid, self-sacrificing, passive, submissive, emotional and dutiful towards their husbands and family members.. This system of patriarchy is based upon the concept of hierarchical binaries of genders, proclaiming man's superiority and woman's inferiority. It allows man to assert his authority in all possible forms, seemingly, in order to sustain stability in marriage and family.

### **Laws of Manu and Tendulkar**

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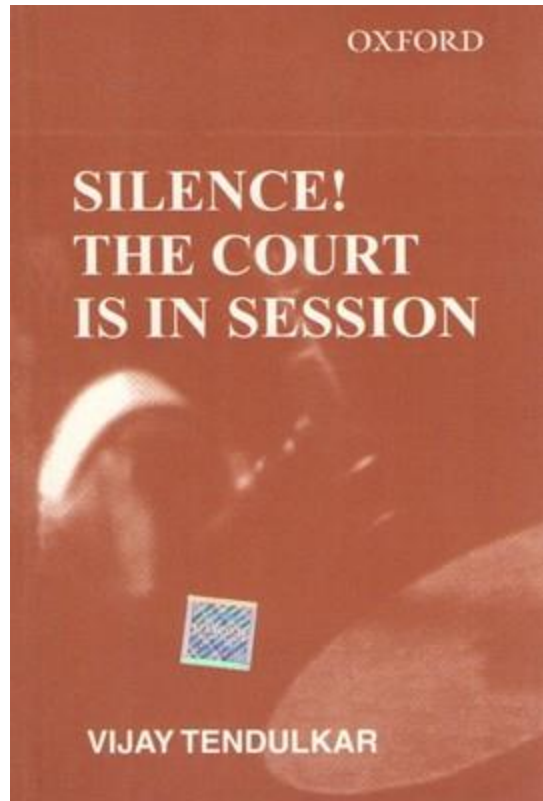
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Traditional Indian society has accepted the laws of Manu and sanctions all forms of power to man in order to disempower woman. Even after all talks about gender equality, and women's liberation, women are still dominated by men, in their personal as well as public life. In this society, woman has no right to assert her identity. But a man usually enjoys this patriarchal control over woman and many times it leads to brutality.

Various critics have expressed their views regarding Tendulkar's treatment of these women's issues, violence against women, man-woman relationships, conflicts and alienation of modern men and women. N. S. Dharan in his article "Gyno-centrism in Silence! The Court is in Session and Kamala", states that in these women-centred works "feministic ideology which pits women in direct encounter with the chauvinistic male oppressor, finds its full and free expression"(Dharan49). Similarly, Veena Noble Dass says in her article, "Women Characters in Vijay Tendulkar's Plays", that he has succeeded "in portraying them differently and raised the status of Indian woman from a weak person to a powerful one"(Dass.14). Katherine Thankamma is of the view that the patriarchal system in his plays has "effectively stifled the female voice for centuries" (Thankamma.80).

### **Tendulkar's Treatment of Female Protagonists**

Tendulkar treats his female protagonists with a great comprehension and sympathy. His female characters reveal his intensive treatment of themes like social conscience and complex human relationships. He presents his characters in a natural form. They all are absolutely different in behavioural traits, age, class and character. And through these female characters he exposes the deprivation, humiliation, commodification and suppression of women, thereby investigating the plight and misery of women in the past as well as in contemporary Indian society. Tendulkar's female characters belong to different strata of Indian society. Though they have different status and background, they are allotted the same ill-treatment in various situations by the male-dominated society.



### **Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session***

Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session* is a bold, vivacious, full of life woman, a teacher by profession. Jyoti, an educated, young, but meek girl belonging to an affluent class, Rama in the *Vultures*, a submissive and sensitive victim of the patriarchal social set up, and her sister-in-law Manik, an advanced woman.....all are crushed, deflated and tortured by the males in one way or the other.

### **The Place and Description of Patriarchy**

In Vijay Tendulkar's plays men are highly immersed in patriarchy. Arun Athavale and Nath Devalikar in *Kanyadan*, Ramakant, Umakant and Pappa in *The Vultures*, and most of the male characters in *Silence! The court is in Session*, are totally biased against women and staunch believer of patriarchy, which justifies limited freedom for women. Though the society makes high claims of evolution, "it seems to be in no mood to give women equal share" in real life.

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## **Submissive State of Women**

Highlighting this submissive state of women in our society, J. M. Waghmare aptly comments: “women have been standing at the crossroads of history for centuries with tears in their eyes and milk in their breasts. In *Silence, The court is in Session*, he shows how women are exploited, tortured and victimized by the patriarchal society.

Tendulkar explores the perilous position of young educated women in a middle class male-dominated society. He deals with issues like man-woman relationship, caste system and gender prejudices. The play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, a translation of Tendulkar’s Marathi play named *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*, projects the plight of Leela Benare, a teacher by profession. In the play, the playwright introduces a theatre group that concentrates on some social evil, dissects it and finally disrupts it for its elimination through stage performances before the village. The play exposes the hypocrisy and cruelty of all those male members of this amateur theatre group, who are supposed to uphold the conventional social morality.

In the name of so-called game of a mock-trial, these people don’t miss a single chance to expose Leela's private life revealing her illegitimate relationship with Prof. Damle. Leela Benare is a woman of free will and full of life, but she soon realizes that her desires are not hers at all. What starts as a harmless rehearsal of a mock-trial scene, quickly changes into a vicious tearing apart of someone’s individual right to privacy. And the verdict was to dismiss her from her job and to kill the foetus in her womb. But, the man, who was equally responsible for the guilt remains acquitted. No one raises a single finger against him. She has fallen victim to patriarchy in this Indian society.

## ***Kanyadan***

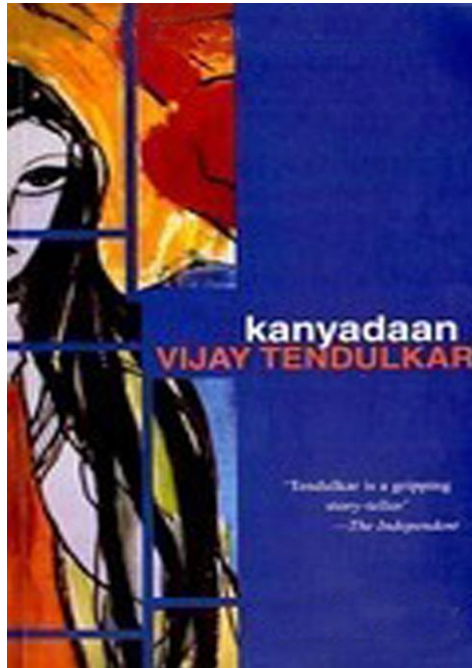
In the play *Kanyadan*, the protagonist Jyoti is also an educated girl who belongs to the sophisticated class. But she also becomes the victim of this social injustice, oppression, dispossession inflicted by the patriarchal society. Through these plays, it becomes clear that even educated women have no right to take their decisions independently. Even getting education is

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no security against oppression and maltreatment in this male-dominated society. A woman has no right to challenge and flout its social norms.



Though, Nath Devalikar, an MLA and social activist, wants to bring a social change in society, by allowing his daughter to marry a Dalit man, Arun, he never thinks about his daughter's future - of how she will cope up with the different social strata of the Dalits class?

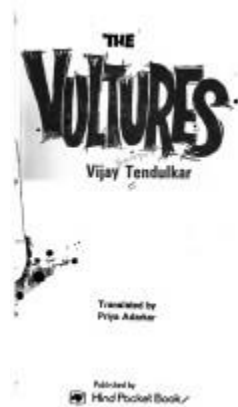
Though, Jyoti's was a love marriage, she denounces all social norms in order to marry Arun. But he turns out to be a man, who seeks vengeance on aristocratic people, whom he considers responsible for the ageless deprivation and degradation of Dalits. She loves Arun wholeheartedly, but in return Arun abuses Jyoti, beats her brutally, kicks her when she is pregnant. He is an alcoholic, never does any work. Though educated, Jyoti never takes a step against her husband's cruelty. She considers him as her 'Pati Parmeshwar' a tag given by the patriarchal society. Jyoti's father attitude is typical male chauvinistic attitude, which rejects his wife's apprehension about accepting Arun as her son-in-law. But in a patriarchal society a female has no personal opinion of her own. She has to remain subservient to her husband's decisions.

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Jyoti's father preaches that only a woman can change her husband's life and turn him into a good man by her loving and caring attitude. Thus, Jyoti seems to be the embodiment of wrong notions and ideals dictated to her by the male members of her family. Through Jyoti and Arun's relationship, the playwright also draws attention to the fact that discrimination and oppressive social division in India, are also few of the important causes of rebellion and violence in society. Vijay Tendulkar in his plays makes it very clear that even educated and self-reliant women like Leela, Jyoti and Rama are not only humiliated and tortured by their male counterparts, but also subjected to various types of violence within and/or outside the home. Even their education has failed to banish these ingrained evils from society.



### ***Vultures***

Tendulkar's next play, *Vultures*, carries another dimension regarding patriarchy. The play is a vicious post-mortem of humanity, exposing its unheard of tendencies to violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer callousness. Violence against women in India is perpetrated irrespective of class, caste and creed. In Tendulkar's plays, the male characters unleash violence on females in various forms and degrees to assert their authority in order to satisfy their sadism and egotism. Physically, they are subjected to beating, thrashing and merciless slavery; sexually, they are abused, subjugated and suppressed; a woman becomes victim of marital rape; psychologically, they are inflicted with mental stress and torment; mentally, they are pressurized to agree to these stereotyped societal norms and emotionally, they are blackmailed, deprived and humiliated.

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## **Cheating and Mistrust**

The play *Vultures* is characterized by cheating, mistrust, exploitation, and humiliation in family relationships and the worst sufferers are the women of the household. The father Hari Pitale cheats his own brother in business and becomes a prosperous man. His children Umakant, Ramakant and Manik are real vultures in the garb of humans. They are gluttonous, mercenary, inhuman, brutal, ferocious, pompous, and stubborn. They would kill anyone for money. Rama, the wife of Ramakant, a figurehead of stereotype traditional social norms, suffers distressful experiences in her trapped marriage. On the other hand, Manik, the daughter of the house, has a western life style, falls victim to many types of violence, even at the hands of her brothers. Manik has turned into a classic slut, now pregnant with her lover's child.

## **Rama – Committing *Sati* Every Moment!**

Rama, in the play, has been living a life of a slave. She has just one wish in her life, that is, to have a baby, which remains unfulfilled due to her husband's impotency. But, like any patriarchal husband, he never acknowledges his faults and calls her a barren woman. In our society, if a woman couldn't become a mother, she has to bear the humiliation and people taunt her by calling her infertile, and barren. The society never blames the man for not becoming a father even though he is biologically incompetent to produce an offspring; but the blame is always cast upon the woman.

In our society, the primary duty of a woman is to bear and rear children and look after her home. If a woman wants to get a high position in her family, she has to give birth to a male heir. And in such a society, woman often oppressed and subjugated, never get enough strength to speak against their husbands, however callous they become against them. Rama has secret admiration for Rajninath, Pappa's illegitimate son, but is afraid of expressing her emotions openly. Rama is trapped in such a situation where she can't live with her husband, while unable to escape from him. She vents her anger in front of Rajninath:

In this living death of my wifehood – I commit 'Sati' every moment! I am consumed!  
And do you know something? I wouldn't lie to you – recently – for the past several years – I've

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never get up again. So, he'll never show me to any new swami, astrologer or healer. So he won't make disgusting drunken love to me. Won't look at me with drooling lips – and talk to me of babies (Tendulkar.P.242)

### **Does a Woman Ever Really Get What She Wants in a Patriarchal System?**

Now, the question arises: Does a woman ever really get what she wants in a patriarchal system? Not really, as her life course is decided by others, her choices are limited, and her destiny is one of disillusion and unhappiness. During her adulthood, she is the responsibility of her father and after marriage her husband's and after husband's death the son dominates her personality. A woman is always considered as a liability to be gotten rid of. On the other hand, the husband is free to have as many concubines as he wants and openly tell his wife about his polygamous stories: "Last Night I went to Tamasha. These days I go daily. And I do many other things too. If anyone objects, let them cover their eyes. Day before yesterday, I went to a woman". Through this husband-wife relationship between Rama and Ramakant, the playwright makes a scathing attack on the double standards of the conventional morality that dictates a woman to be chaste and let's man go scot-free. Another female victim is Manik who suffers immensely because of her brothers' selfish and wicked plans for their own benefit. Though, she is immoral, the treatment she receives at her brothers' hands is not just. The brothers abuse her, use sexist language against her - refer to her as a buffalo, a bitch, and a woman who falls in the gutter.

So, Tendulkar portrays the unfortunate situation of women in male dominated society. All these above discussed plays show that even independent, educated women characters are not only supposed, but also forced to fit in, or accept these stereotyped familial traditions, ethical mores and social norms. And, if a woman refused to follow these rules, she has to face the consequences in various forms of abuse, such as disgust, disgrace, violence and expulsion from homes etc. What Simon de Beauvoir says of women is apt for Vijay Tendulkar's women characters:

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“They have gained only what has been willingly granted; they have taken nothing, they have only received” (Beauvoir xv).

### **To Conclude**

All these plays show that the reasons for exploitation keep on changing, but the victim remains the same. Though the women want to articulate their sufferings, they have to strangle themselves, fearing one thing or another. The institution of family and marriage also acts as a means of exploitation and suppression. The present study indicates that women in the plays of Tendulkar are in a helpless situation, mainly because of the life-denying atmosphere of a rigid and rusted patriarchal system. However, it doesn't mean that all women in his plays are innocent, since some women we see are themselves responsible for their miserable condition.

As a social dramatist, he registers his utmost resentment against the hypocrisy and hollowness prevailing in contemporary society. His plays transcend the limits of time and clime. According to Fren B. Mee: “I hope that each play will take people on a journey.....however, the journey need not be to India. It can be a journey into one's own self from a silence outside one's cultural view point” (Mee.81). Thus, the dramatist presents the universal plight of women in his plays; she has no will of her own; she has to depend on male members. Even the independent woman's extent of freedom is very limited. By projection of life at its worst, Tendulkar reveals his adherence to humanitarian values at their best.

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Anju Bala, Ph.D. Research Scholar  
Department of English & Foreign Languages  
Maharshi Dayanand University  
Rohtak 124001  
Haryana  
India  
[anju.ahlawat26@gmail.com](mailto:anju.ahlawat26@gmail.com)

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 **14:3 March 2014**

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